

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 812
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
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AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
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DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 3910

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BL
SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN: THE OPPOSITION MAKES SOME GAINS
BUT PEREDA REMAINS THE FRONTRUNNER

REF: LA PAZ 3476

1. SUMMARY: WITHIN 60 DAYS OF THE JULY 9 ELECTIONS THE BOLIVIAN ELECTORATE'S MOOD IS A MIXTURE OF APATHY, CONFUSION AND UNCERTAINTY OVER THE OUTCOME AND WHAT THE RETURN TO ELECTED CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WILL MEAN FOR THE NATION. DESPITE HIS CAMPAIGN WEAKNESSES, THE MILITARY-BACKED CANDIDATE, FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER GENERAL JUAN PEREDA IS THE FRONTRUNNER BY FAR. BUT HIS VOTING SUPPORT IN RURAL AREAS IS BEING ERODED BY CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE RENE BERNAL (WHO SPEAKS QUECHUA) AND IN SANTA CRUZ BY A NEW CANDIDATE, RETIRED COL. JOSE PATINO AYOROA, BACKED BY THE RIGHT WING OF THE BOLIVIAN FALANGE PARTY. PEREDA'S MAIN THREAT, HOWEVER, IS FROM FORMER MNR PRESIDENT HERNAN SILES ZUAZO, WHOSE LEFTIST COALITION IS EXPECTED TO DOMINATE THE URBAN LABOR VOTE. INDIVIDUALLY, NONE OF THE OPPONENTS CAN BEAT PEREDA, BUT UNITED
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THEY COULD MAKE IT A CLOSER RACE. AN UNKNOWN IS VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO, EXPECTED TO RETURN TO BOLIVIA ON MAY 18 AFTER FOUR YEARS IN EXILE. PAZ COULD STILL PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THE ELECTION OUTCOME. END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE FINAL 60 DAYS OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN BOLIVIA'S MOOD IS A MIXTURE OF APATHY, CONFUSION AND FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN.

WITH 12 YEARS HAVING PASSED SINCE THE LAST ELECTION, MOST BOLIVIANS ARE UNCERTAIN HOW THE ELECTION PROCESS WILL EVOLVE. WHAT THE OUTCOME WILL BE, OR WHAT IT WILL MEAN FOR BOLIVIA. RECENT CAMPAIGN EVENTS HAVE CREATED THE GROWING REALIZATION THAT BOLIVIA HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY IN THE LAST 12 YEARS. THE POPULAR BELIEF WHAT THE "GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED" CANDIDATE WILL NECESSARILY WIN, IS STILL PARTY VALID, BUT NO LONGER ABSOLUTE. THIS HAS ENCOURAGED A STILL-DIVIDED OPPOSITION AND KEPT ALIVE THE POSSIBILITY OF ELECTION POSTPONEMENT TO AVOID A LOSS BY THE MILITARY-BACKED CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA. ADD TO THIS THE EXPECTED RETURN TO BOLIVIA ON MAY 18 OF VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO, AND THE GROUNDWORK IS LAID, ASSUMING ELECTIONS DO OCCUR, FOR A WIDE OPEN ELECTION WITH THE OUTCOME LESS CERTAIN THAN MOST OBSERVERS WOULD HAVE BELIEVED THREE MONTHS AGO.

3. THE PEREDA CAMPAIGN. UNDERLYING MUCH OF THE UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE POLITICAL PROCESS IS THE CONTINUING CAMPAIGN WEAKNESS OF FORMER AIR FORCE GENERAL AND INTERIOR MINISTER JUAN PEREDA ASBUN. AS THE "OFFICIAL" CANDIDATE, PEREDA WAS EXPECTED TO MONOPOLIZE THE VOTE OF BOLIVIA'S 3 MILLION PEASANTS (60-65 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE), WITH THE MILITARY-PEASANT PACT (PACTO CAMPESINO MILITAR) AND THE FEDERATION OF RURAL WORKERS EXPECTED TO GET OUT THE RURAL VOTE. PEREDA WAS ALSO EXPECTED TO RECEIVE THE VOTE OF THE GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY, THE MIDDLE CLASS, THE UPPER CLASS PRIVATE BUSINESS SECTOR AND THOSE LABOR SECTORS WHICH BENEFITTED MOST UNDER BANZER, SUCH AS THE

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TRANSPORTATION WORKERS AND THE CONSTRUCTION WORKERS. WHILE STILL GENERALLY VALID, THIS SCHEME HAS BEEN JOLTED RECENTLY BY THE UNEXPECTED STRENGTH OF FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER RENE BERNAL IN SOME RURAL AREAS, AND BY THE RECENTLY DECLARED CANDIDACY OF JOSE PATINO AYOROA, BACKED BY THE RIGHT WING OF THE FSB PARTY. PATINO COULD TAKE VOTES FROM PEREDA IN THE SANTA CRUZ AREA, AND AMONGST FSB SUPPORTERS, BUT MORE IMPORTANT IS THE POTENTIAL DIVISION PATINO COULD CAUSE IN THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY'S SUPPORT FOR PEREDA AND HENCE IN HIS "OFFICIALIST" IMAGE. PEREDA'S CAMPAIGN STILL SUFFERS FROM PROBLEMS, INCLUDING A SHORTAGE OF FUNDS, TEPID SUPPORT FROM PRESIDENT BANZER, AND BICKERING AMONG THE DISPARATE ELEMENTS OF HIS PARTY COALITION, WHICH HAVE PREVENTED HIM FROM PUBLISHING HIS PLATFORM AND SLOWED THE SELECTION OF A VICE-PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATE. FINALLY, BOTH THE "PACTO CAMPESINO-MILITAR" AND THE RURAL WORKERS

CONFEDERATION ARE TURNING OUT TO BE LESS EFFECTIVE IN ORGANIZING THE RURAL VOTERS THAN PEREDA HOPED. CONSEQUENTLY, WHILE PEREDA REMAINS THE FRONTRUNNER, HIS WEAK COALITION AND HIS OWN MEDIOCRE PERSONAL SHOWING ARE CASTING DOUBT NOT SO MUCH ABOUT WHETHER HE WILL WIN, BUT RATHER HOW STRONGLY HE WILL WIN AND WHETHER HE WILL BE ABLE TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY AFTER THE ELECTIONS.

4. PEREDA'S TWO MILITARY OPPONENTS, RENE BERNAL AND JOSE PATINO, ARE NOT LIKELY TO RUN AS STRONGLY AS FORMER PRESIDENT HERNAN SILEZ ZUAZO, BUT THEIR VOTER SUPPORT WILL COME FROM SECTORS PARTIAL TO PEREDA RATHER THAN SILES, AND THEREFORE WILL CUT INTO PEREDA'S LEAD.

5. RENE BERNAL HAS BEEN MAKING A STRONGER THAN EXPECTED SHOWING AND BREAKING SOME TRADITIONS. HAVING HIS WIFE ACCOMPANY HIM ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL IS AN INVITATION WHICH HAS INSPIRED FEMININE INTEREST. BERNAL'S MAY 8 RALLY AT UCURENA IN THE COCHABAMBA VALLEY WAS THE FIRST APPEARANCE BY AN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE AT THAT LOCATION SINCE BOLIVIA'S AGRARIAN REFORM ACT WAS SIGNED THERE IN 1953. RELIABLE OBSERVERS SAID THAT THE NUMBER

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OF SPECTATORS (ABOUT 3,000-4,000) WERE TWO TO THREE TIMES LARGER THAN A RALLY AT THE SAME SITE BY PEREDA AND BANZER THE WEEK BEFORE. THE TURNOUT WAS ESPECIALLY IMPRESSIVE GIVEN NONGOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO DISSUADE PEOPLE FROM ATTENDING. POLICE TRIED TO BLOCK ROADS AND TURN BACK PARTICIPANTS; AN AIR FORCE DC-3 CIRCLED OVER THE CROWD DURING THE SPEECHES, AND POLICE AGENTS ALLEGEDLY NOTED NAMES OF PARTICIPANTS AND TRUCK AND AUTO LICENSES. THE QUECHUA-SPEAKING BERNAL'S APPEAL TO RURAL VOTERS HAS CAUSED SOME PEREDA FOLLOWERS TO WRITE OFF ORURO, BERNAL'S HOME

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DEPARTMENT, AND THEY CONCEDE HE COULD DO WELL IN RURAL AREAS OF COCHABAMBA DEPARTMENT. HOWEVER, BERNAL DOES NOT YET HAVE BROAD EXPOSURE NOR IS HIS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY LARGE ENOUGH TO POLICE ALL THE RURAL POLLING PLACES, NOR WILL HE RECEIVE MANY VOTES FROM BOLIVIA'S MAJOR CITIES.

6. COLONEL JOSE PATINO AROROA IS A NEW AND COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THREAT TO PEREDA. PATINO WAS SELECTED CANDIDATE ON MAY 7 BY THE MARIO GUTIERREZ WING OF THE FSB PARTY AT ITS CONVENTION IN COCHABAMBA. RETIRED FROM THE ARMY IN 1974 FOR PLOTTING AGAINST BANZER, PATINO IS A MEMBER OF THE "TOPATER" GROUP OF RETIRED MILITARY WHO HAVE STRONGLY OPPOSED BANZER. GUTIERREZ HAS BEEN ONE OF BANZER'S CLOSEST ASSOCIATES AND PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE 1971 COUP WHICH PUT BANZER TO POWER. HE DECLINED TO FOLLOW THE MODERATE WING OF THE FSB IN SUPPORTING PEREDA, ALLEGEDLY BECAUSE HE WAS CONSPIRING TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS. THE JOINING OF BANZER'S FORMER CLOSE ASSOCIATE AND BANZER'S ENEMY HAS RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INTENTIONS OF PATINO'S CANDIDACY. THERE ARE UNSUBSTANTIATED RUMORS THAT BANZER PROVIDED FINANCING FOR GUTIERREZ, THE FSB CONVENTION AND MANY CONFIDENTIAL

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OBSERVERS SUSPECT THAT GUTIERREZ AND PATINO WILL CONTINUE TO PLOT AGAINST ELECTIONS. WHILE PATINO MIGHT DRAW SOME VOTES FROM PEREDA IN SANTA CRUZ AND COCHABAMBA, FSB IS ANATHEMA TO RURAL VOTERS AND PATINO COULD EXPECT NO SUPPORT FROM THAT SECTOR. BY FURTHER WEAKENING PEREDA'S STRENGTH, AND HIS IMAGE AS THE SOLE "MILITARY" CANDIDATE, PATINO COULD BE TRYING TO PROVIDE AN EXCUSE TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS.

7. PEREDA'S MAJOR OPPONENT IN TERMS OF VOTER APPEAL IS FORMER PRESIDENT HERNAN SILES ZUAZO, BACKED BY A LEFTIST COALITION. SILES WILL GET MOST OF HIS SUPPORT FROM LABOR, ESPECIALLY MINERS AND STUDENTS AND FROM THE OTHER ELEMENTS OF BOLIVIAN SOCIETY DISAFFECTED FROM THE BANZER GOVERNMENT. SILES' CANDIDACY WAS FORMALLY LAUNCHED ONLY ON APRIL 28 AND HIS CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION SEEMS VERY WEAK OUTSIDE LA PAZ AND IN SOME AREAS IS NONEXISTENT. MOREOVER, DESPITE HIS PRESIDENCY UNDER THE MNR FROM 1956-60, SILES APPEARS TO HAVE LITTLE PERSONAL FOLLOWING IN RURAL AREAS OUTSIDE THE LA PAZ DEPARTMENT AND VIRTUALLY NO RURAL ORGANIZATION. SILES' MAJOR THREAT TO PEREDA AT THIS

POINT IS THAT HE MIGHT WIN THE MAJORITY OF THE URBAN VOTE (SOME 40 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL) AND CAUSE TROUBLE FOR PEREDA AFTER ELECTIONS.

8. THE UNKNOWN FACTOR - VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO. SECHEDULED TO RETURN TO BOLIVIA ON MAY 18, PAZ HAS NOT REVEALED WHAT POSITION HE WILL TAKE AND HAS INSTRUCTED HIS FOLLOWERS TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH ALL POLITICAL GROUPS PENDING HIS ARRIVAL. WHILE PAZ' MOST LOYAL FOLLOWERS TEND TO BE AT LEAST MIDDLE-AGED AND FEW IN NUMBER, HE IS STILL CONSIDERED THE MNR CHIEF BY MOST PARTY FACTIONS. HE ALSO RETAINS CONSIDERABLE PERSONAL POPULARITY IN RURAL AREAS BECAUSE OF THE LAND REFORM HE INSTIGATED IN 1953. WHILE PROBABLY NOT A DETERMINING FACTOR, CONFIDENTIAL

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PAZ' SUPPORT WOULD BE A MAJOR BOOST IN RURAL AREAS FOR ANY CANDIDATE. IF ANY OF THE THREE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES WERE TO GET TOGETHER SOMEHOW (A COMBINATION OF SILES AND BERNAL, FOR EXAMPLE), SUCH A TICKET COULD GIVE PEREDA A TUSSLE, BUT WOULD PROBABLY STILL LOSE WITHOUT THE RURAL VOTING SUPPORT WHICH PAZ COULD PROVIDE.

9. CONCLUSION: WITH LESS THAN 60 DAYS TO GO, PEREDA IS BY FAR THE FRONTRUNNER, BUT WEAKER THAN EXPECTED IN RURAL AREAS WHERE MOST OF HIS VOTERS WILL COME FROM. AS LONG AS HIS OPPOSITION REMAINS DIVIDED, HE WILL PROBABLY WIN, BUT IF ELEMENTS OF THE OPPOSITION COULD UNITE THEY COULD MAKE IT A CLOSER RACE. FINALLY, VICTOR PAZ REMAINS A KEY UNDECLARED FACTOR AND PAZ' POPULARITY IN RURAL AREAS COULD DEFINITELY AFFECT THE OUTCOME. BOLIVIAN POLITICS IS SELDOM LOGICAL AND THERE COULD STILL BE MANY SURPRISES BETWEEN NOW AND JULY 9. BOEKER

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